

***Iowa Outdoors***  
**Iowa Department of Natural Resources**  
**www.iowadnr.gov**

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**Dec. 16, 2008**

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**ANGLER FEES IMPROVE FISHING, LEAD TO INCREASED PARK USE**

DES MOINES - Iowa anglers purchasing fishing licenses provide a vital source of funding the Iowa Department of Natural Resources uses to pay for a portion of lake renovation and restoration projects. These efforts contribute significantly to the surrounding park by increasing visitation to the area.

This partnership has become more common in the past 10 years and anglers and campers are enjoying the success. License dollars are key to providing good fishing in Iowa but the bottom line is, as the amount of money shrinks, the number of projects is likely to shrink as well.

“We are hoping that our anglers see the value of investing their fishing license dollars in lake improvements that not only benefit them, but also benefit the surrounding park,” said Ken Herring, administrator for the Conservation and Recreation division, which oversees fisheries and state parks bureaus. “Our parks staff can demonstrate that where we have our lakes with better water quality, our parks have higher camping and visitor numbers.”

Beginning in the middle 1990s, the Iowa DNR took a comprehensive approach to fixing lakes. Using money from hunting and fishing license sales, the DNR developed a plan as it approached these lake renovations – find and fix the problems in the watershed, protect the shoreline, improve the in-lake fish habitat, eliminate the problem fish, restock the lake with the right fish balance and bring fish closer to shore anglers.

Lake Ahquabi was the first major lake renovation success. Lake Ahquabi was in a downward spiral. Fishing pressure was low. Park use was estimated at 60,000 visitor days per year. The lake was filled with carp, gizzard shad and slow growing panfish.

Once the work was completed, the water quality improved and the fish community became much more attractive to anglers. Visitor days increased three fold to 206,000 per year. While the overall cost of the project was just under \$4 million, it took less than two years to pay back in recreational benefits based on studies showing each park visitor spends \$20 per day and the usage increase of 150,000 per year since the work was done.

The complementary relationship between lakes and parks has blossomed in other areas including a number in southwest Iowa, including Lake Anita.

Lake Anita was choked with stunted yellow bass, so in 2003 the DNR drained the lake, killed what fish remained, deepened the shoreline, installed underwater mounds and structure, and added pea gravel spawning areas to attract bluegills and largemouth bass closer to shore

Unfortunately, it took three years for the lake to refill. But the results are irrefutable. Fishing for bluegills, largemouth bass and channel catfish is phenomenal. Rooted aquatic vegetation is back and the water quality is excellent. The tremendous fishing for 14 to 19-inch bass has attracted six bass fishing tournaments in 2008.

Visitation and camping numbers at the state park are way up. In 2002 before the renovation, park visitations were estimated at more than 250,000 and camper nights at 19,500. In 2007, park visitations were estimated at 286,000 and camper nights at more than 21,000. The increase in activity means more money is spent in the local economy.

Heading south on County Hwy. 148 sits 665-acre Lake Icaria that faced a similar fate as Anita. The lake renovation in 2004 included significant work in the watershed, adding silt retention structures and applying conservation practices on the land. The plan also included a 52-acre wetland on the upper end of the lake to remove nutrients and sediments from the runoff before the water entered Icaria.

The project has produced excellent growth rates in bluegills, crappies, walleyes and largemouth bass and the water clarity improved from one foot to nearly four feet. The lake is attracting so many people to fish and camp at the county park that the staff is working hard to keep up. The marina at Icaria has seen a jump in business, too.

People take notice of these success stories and want to repeat them for their own area. Green Valley Lake and the state park are currently undergoing one of these major renovation projects.

“This should be another huge success story. We expect many of our park users to use Green Valley as a jumping point to fish Three Mile and Twelve Mile lakes soon, then

to stay and fish Green Valley Lake when the fishery rebounds,” said Jim Lawson, supervisor for state parks in south central Iowa. “Good fishing gets the park use and camping season off to an earlier start. Anglers tend to be out in the cooler spring weather where our regular campers tend to wait for the better, warmer weather before coming out.”

Based on a survey in 2000, campers spend an average of \$63.23 each camping night in a park. Parks that have better water quality have more visitors and campers and more repeat customers.

“People will travel greater distances to visit a park that has better fishing because they feel they are guaranteed fishing success,” Lawson said.

Lake of Three Fires is another example of fishing license dollars working to improve a lake, and park improvements combine to increase angler visits and park use.

“We have never seen water quality as good as it is now in Lake of Three Fires in the 70 year history of the lake,” said Mike McGhee, lake restoration coordinator for the DNR. “Looking back as far as the fishing records go, which is 40 years, we have never had fishing this good.”

Largemouth bass, bluegills and crappies are growing and plentiful. New access roads, in lake fish habitat, shore fishing access, boat ramps and cabins were all added or improved. The result is a nearly 100 percent increase in campers from 2005 to 2007.

“I can understand people not wanting to pay more to fish and hunt in our state, but, until something changes, our conservation efforts are carried on the backs of our hunters and anglers and we are to the point where a fee increase is necessary,” Herring said. “The cost of doing business keeps going up. We have cut where we can cut. We are not filling vacant positions and have put a freeze on any equipment purchases. We are down to the barebones.

“These lakes and wildlife areas belong to our hunters and anglers and they have to decide if they want these areas to grow and thrive or if they want us to do the minimal to try to maintain the status quo. The license increase does not amount to much in the grand scheme, and even at \$23.50, the fee is to fish all year is pretty cheap when compared to other forms of entertainment. There are not many places anglers can invest their money and be the direct beneficiary from that investment,” he said.

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**CONOVER, JOSLIN TO RETIRE FROM THE DNR**

DES MOINES - Two longtime leaders for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Marion Conover, bureau chief for fisheries, and Lowell Joslin, bureau chief of law enforcement, plan to retire on Dec. 25.

Conover began his career in 1970 as the fisheries biologist at Clear Lake. In 1973, he was promoted to fisheries management supervisor for the southwest district at Cold Springs. In 1977, Conover became the fisheries management supervisor in the Des Moines office. He was named chief fisheries bureau in 1992 overseeing a staff of 94.

Joslin began his career as a conservation officer for Jefferson and Van Buren counties in 1978. Joslin was named supervisor for the south central district in 1984, and assistant chief of law enforcement in 1988. He was named chief of the law enforcement bureau in 1999 overseeing a staff of 98.

Each bureau will have an interim chief appointed until the positions are filled.

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## **LAST MINUTE OUTDOOR HOLIDAY GIFT IDEAS**

- A camping coupon book is good for seven nights in a state park campground. It saves \$3 off the peak season electrical campsite regular price. Books are available for \$91 at any state park or DNR regional office.
- Hunting and fishing licenses for 2009 are now on sale.
- Specialty tree and shrub packets from the state forest nursery designed to attract songbirds to the backyard or larger packets designed for turkey, pheasant or quail. One packet allows the person to create their own packet. Prices range from \$20 to \$90. More information is available online at [www.iowadnr.gov/forestry](http://www.iowadnr.gov/forestry)
- Subscription to *Iowa Outdoors*, the Iowa DNR's magazine of conservation printed six times each year for \$12.
- 2009 *Iowa Outdoors* calendars are available to purchase individually for \$3.50.
- Outdoor themed clothing from the Iowa Nature Store, including new designs available for the holidays beginning Dec. 17. Go to [www.iowanaturestore.com](http://www.iowanaturestore.com) for more information.

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